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SPEECH

OF

HON. ALFRED WELLS, OF NEW YORK,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FEBRUARY 6, 1861.



The House having under consideration the report from the select committee of thirty-three—

Mr. WELLS said:

Mr. SPEAKER: I believe I feel the importance of this great occasion. I think no man born in this favored land, surrounded by all the blessings which attend our institutions, can possibly be indifferent to the existing state of facts—can possibly see with unconcern State after State leave, so far as their action is concerned, this glorious Confederacy, this Union fraught with its untold blessings, and of those which yet remain, see State after State, either by their Representatives on this floor, or through the action of their Legislatures or conventions, threaten soon to leave this Republic; and, sir, in my estimation, that man can have but little patriotism who would not, for the sake of preserving our national Union and liberties, sacrifice life itself upon the altar of his country. That man is little worthy of esteem who so values the few fleeting years that remain to him that he would save his dastard life at the cost of his country's welfare and his country's existence.

Now, sir, I believe, if there is any issue from the present difficulties which surround us, it is not to be found in the wisdom of statesmen, not to be found in the wisdom of man. The providence of God alone can extricate us from a position from which it seems impossible to escape; for, sir, to my mind—and I have endeavored to look over the ground so far as I possibly could without passion and without prejudice—there is no possible escape from a dissolution of the Union.

Mr. Speaker, if there is any escape, the beginning of the way that is to open up before us is to be found in a change of the dispositions of the two sections of the Union. As wide apart in opinion as the poles are asunder, it is impossible for us, occupying the opposite grounds on which we stand, ever to unite on a common basis until we begin to feel toward one another as brother should feel toward brother. Last night, sir, I saw published in the daily papers an account of the condition of one of the States of this Union, the youngest of the sister States, the last that has

come within our family circle. I saw, by that statement, that fifty thousand human beings stand on the verge of starvation. This morning I endeavored to gain the ear of the House, with the hope that we would follow the generous examples which have been twice, at least, set us in the history of this Government. Once was when, touched by the finger of the Almighty, the mountains smoked and the earth quaked. When the capital of the Republic of Venezuela, then just born into a national existence, was buried beneath the tremblings of the earth, and ten thousand human beings were overwhelmed in the ruins of their habitations, then the great Republic of America stretched out her hand to the afflicted sister, and gave the needed bread.

And again, sir, when that island, famous in the history of modern civilization, famous for its advocates of the rights of man, felt the blight which struck the staple production of its inhabitants, and when its starving millions began to die within the cities' walls and in the thronged lanes of its populous districts, in the other end of this Capitol arose the Senator from Kentucky—the venerable Mr. CRITTENDEN—and proposed that this Union should give \$500,000 to save the starving Irish men and women. That was seconded by the immortal Webster, and by the dauntless Calhoun, then standing on the edge of the grave—his trumpet voice grown so feeble under the infirmities of age that the reporters could scarce catch its tones. That gallant man of the gallant State of South Carolina proposed to aid, not Ireland only, but France also, which then stood trembling on the brink of another famine. I had hoped, sir, that now, when the wail of the women and the men, and the children of Kansas reached the ears of the members of this House, they would, with one accord and with one voice, as brethren reaching out the hand to brethren, give a mite, a little mite, to save them from starvation. And, sir, had it been done, under the circumstances of the case, it would have done more, in the providence of God, to save this Union, than all the speeches made on this floor; because, if the South, which had sent to the battle-fields of Kansas its

armed men to plant the institution of slavery there; if the South, which had by overwhelming numbers from the free States, been foiled in its purpose by the ballot-box and the bayonet; if the South, thus baffled and defeated, had, in its magnanimity, with all its generous impulses aroused, responded to the cry of distress from afflicted Kansas, and said, "These are still our brethren and our sisters; we will give them what we ought from our overflowing Treasury," the act would have touched the national heart, broke through the icy fetters of a selfishness that can see its own but not another's virtues, can feel its own but not another's woes, and thus inaugurated that charity which can alone make us bear with a brother's faults and errors, and make us seek, from genuine feeling of affection, a brother's good.

Sir, our national Treasury does overflow with a people's wealth, though the vaults of the sub-Treasury may be empty. The Almighty has given us an abundant harvest. And though He who sends down His rain and His sun upon the just and the unjust, has closed for a season the windows of the heavens, and refused to the farmer's grain in Kansas its wonted increase, never before in the history of the country have the fields of other States yielded so ample a return to the labors of the husbandman. And, sir, I feel that the little pittance which I designed to ask for Kansas could have been given without suffering to us, and without being liable to those constitutional objections which a charity to foreign nations would be likely to raise.

I believe, sir, that the remedy for the existing evils is to be found, if found at all, not in the head, but the heart of the people. There is no nation on the face of this earth, so far as intellectual culture is concerned, can compare with ours. But, sir, I regret to say that, while the mind is cultured to its highest capacity, those affections which really constitute the man, upon which alone genuine manhood can be built, have not received the nurture which they ought. If they had, we would not see to-day the marshaling in hostile array of the armies of the North and the armies of the South; we would not have drums beating, soldiers marching, and all the devilish enginery of war preparing for the fraternal strife; but instead, all would be striving to cultivate friendly relations by mutual acts of kindness and forbearance, and by the exercise of the broadest charity. All would be striving to remember that the men of the North and the men of the South are children of the same universal Father, who cares as much, and would have us care as much, for the man who lives south of Mason and Dixon's line as for the man who lives north of that line. If we strove so to imitate Him, and to pour out the affections of our hearts towards each other as He does towards all of us, we would soon bring to a peaceful termination the dreadful condition of affairs that now prevails throughout the country.

Sir, what would so touch the heart of the American people as a free-will offering of this Congress? A sudden pause in these angry debates for a free-will offering to the cause of humanity would make a common ground on which we could all plant our

feet and stand solid as the hills. If, in the midst of warlike preparations, yielding to a generous impulse, we should let the cry from Kansas turn the current of our thoughts into the channel of a fraternal love, who can tell how many springs would gush from American hearts, North and South, East and West, to swell that love into a mighty river, widening its fertilizing stream into a shoreless ocean? Sir, not in rain, then, would the rains have been withheld from the prairies of Kansas; not in vain would the seed have shriveled in the parched ground, if the nation could gather in the richer harvest of brotherly affections.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, looking at it not from the heart but from the intellect, that it is an absolute moral impossibility for the North and South to unite in opinion, standing upon the opposite grounds which they occupy. The South says, as its ultimatum, "We must have the Territories of the Union in common; we must be allowed to go there and live there with the men, women, and children we hold as property, or you exclude us from the common soil purchased by the common blood and treasure of the nation; on no other terms can we live with you as equals, and we cannot submit to live with you except as equals." They say to the North, "You know nothing about the institution of slavery; you think of it as a negro driven to the cotton-field under the overseer's lash, with the blood dripping from his back; you think of it as man and wife separated from each other, and denied the privileges of the social circle. You think of it as children in their tender years, torn from their fathers' arms and their mothers' embrace. Come down into our cities and towns, and you will find that we are fathers to our slaves; that we care for them in sickness and provide for them in old age; that negro men and women live among us united by religious ceremonies, surrounded by their families, with homes substantially their own; and that, considering the savage and degraded condition of their ancestors in the wilds of Africa, they have made rapid strides in mental, moral, and religious growth. Let us alone; still the insane excitement in your northern States about the condition of our slaves, about whose condition you know little, and enable us to relax our hand upon them, and we will agitate the question among ourselves, wisely, moderately, how we can best ameliorate their condition and elevate them, consistently with their own safety. Your interference with our institution forces us into its defense; the efforts you blindly make to liberate our slaves compels us to rivet their chains. More than a generation ago, Virginia, now in arms in defense of slavery, day after day, in the most perfect freedom of debate, discussed the emancipation of her slaves, and the measure was lost by a single vote. If your northern free labor possesses those advantages you claim for it, and brings with it the train of individual and national blessings you would make us believe, enable us to see by your example at home that our true interest lies in its introduction with us."

Mr. Speaker, I know that in all this, much, perhaps the main portion, of the picture is true; and I am willing to admit that, to a great extent, the

picture we draw of your institutions is distorted and untrue.

Perhaps we have overlooked the virtues and advantages in your southern institutions, while the faults and blemishes have stood out prominently to view, even as the eye passes unnoticed the fertile plains and valleys that lie nearest us, to gaze upon the bleak and desolate mountains of granite that fringe the distance. Yet our southern brethren cannot deny that the relation between master and slave, while frequently one of affection upon the part of the laborer to the employer, is often one of great dependence, is often one in which the tyranny of the master is exercised over the servility of the slave. I know that no southern slaveholder, no humane and tender-hearted slaveholder, striving to perform his duty to all the members of that society in which Providence has placed him, according to the light afforded him from an age of Christian civilization, can rise upon this floor and say that never, in his experience, has he known acts of inhumanity, the natural outbirth of the institution of slavery, to be committed by the slaveholder on his slave, which have gone unwhipped of justice. Such a slaveholder must grieve with his whole heart that the marriage relation, as a legal institution, is not consistent with the condition of a slave. As he looks upon his own family circle, the tender and loving wife, the brave and free sons, the chaste and beautiful daughters, and feels that all which men strive for, wealth, pleasure, fame, usefulness, is for the sake of that dear home; feels that with that circle unbroken he can buffet the trials and bear the burdens of life with a brave, unrepining heart; and that without those social ties wealth is a mockery, pleasure a mirage, fame a bubble, and usefulness itself a burden, he must needs regret that like hopes and like aspirations are not, cannot be, the lot of his slaves.

Sir, that Christian slaveholder who, for long years, has striven to grow into the image of his Maker; who, profoundly impressed with his responsibilities to God and his fellow-man, has surrendered his life to his Maker, has taken up his cross daily and followed Him; who has made the natural and the sensual faculties of his nature subordinate to his spiritual; and who has so found that the true life which alone is worth living, is a life of beneficence, a life of usefulness, a life which, sunlike, sires the earth with flowers, loads the trees with fruits, fills the air with perfume, and transmutes the dead earth into an Eden—such a man must needs see and grieve over those, whether white or black, free or bond, who still lie immersed in the sensual sty. And such a slaveholder, from experimental knowledge, must know that in the exercise of his freedom alone can man rise above the natural and sensual life into which he is born. I do not mean to say, sir, that a slave cannot thus rise. I know he can; but what I mean to assert is, that the obstacles to his elevation are multiplied and strengthened by the surroundings of his servile state.

We are a nation of Christians. We acknowledge Christ as our leader, as the great exemplar, after whom it is our aim to fashion our lives. The Bible is the word of God, so acknowledged,

in the main, by all. It is believed to be a special revelation of God's will to man—a written law, adapted to all the varied circumstances of life, and embracing within the range of its teachings all classes, conditions, and orders of society. All over the land rise stately structures, on which the wealth of nations has been lavished, where all classes of community assemble to hear the word of God read, to praise Him with music and solemn song, and bend the knee and the spirit in humble supplication and adoration to Him as the universal Father, whose love is over all, whose wisdom guides and illumines all, and whose omnipotence energizes the faculties of all. From earliest infancy our children lisp the prayer which He taught his Disciples—that grand and loving epitome of the heart's adoration and supplication, which it has been our privilege to hear during each day of this Congress. The Sunday schools are thronged with our youth, where the tender minds are taught the precepts of the decalogue; and where the golden rule by which all the actions, the thoughts, and the affections of their future lives are to be measured, is written on their hearts.

Our Christianity is the central sun of our civilization. Its beams penetrated the Egyptian darkness of the middle ages, and lifted that dusky veil which so long rested like an incubus upon the European mind; and from thence hitherto, with augmented heat and light, it has scattered its beams of life and intelligence throughout the world. Not only the arts and sciences, not only forms of beauty and of use have sprung into life with the profuseness of a tropical vegetation, but one by one the great principles of right and wrong have been crystallized into codes and constitutions and laws, which, like the diamond, receive and hold and radiate the focalized beams of the civilization of the past and the present, and light up with constantly increasing splendor the pathway of the future.

The common law of England, that corner-stone of our political structures, is but an aggregation of the truths of Christianity as applied to the occurrences of life; wherever, in its crystalline structure, a speck or flaw or cloud is to be seen, it is because the truths of Christianity have been misunderstood or misapplied. The constitution of England, that shadowy but firm structure which embraces the body-politic of Great Britain, is but a concrete of Christian principles applied to Government; and wherever a shaft totters, or a column crumbles, it is because of the barbarian elements which have been unwisely incorporated in the structure. The law of nations, which has substituted the pursuits of commerce for the trade of the pirate, the arbitrament of peaceful tribunals for the wager of battle, which has whitened the seas with canvas, garnished the shores with cities, and burdened the land with plenty, is but a beam from the sun of Christianity, even now broken and dimmed by the interposing clouds of a lingering barbarianism.

Our republican Constitution, the admiration of the world, which for three quarters of a century has performed its functions almost without a jar, derives all its power from the Christian principles it embodies.

Now, sir, the northern religious man believes the condition of the slave to be at war with the principles of Christianity and with the precepts of the Bible. Though the southern man, educated from infancy in its midst, may look upon the institution as patriarchal, as sanctioned by the precepts and the practices of patriarchs and kings, as Heaven-descended and Bible-sanctioned, yet no amount of logic, no cunning fence of argument, can move the northern religious mind from its positions. The northern religious mind looks, and will continue to look, upon your institution as Bible-denounced and Heaven-accursed; and no law, no punishment, no muzzling of the press, no suppression of discussions, no new alien and seditious laws, can touch its settled convictions. Call it bigotry, fanaticism—call it what you will, it is an incorrigible *opinion*, which can never be moved. And yet, sir, from one who so thought of slavery, I have heard as pure and heartfelt a petition go up to the throne of God for the master as for the slave; and the master held up before the throne of mercy not as a tyrant, or as a fiend, but as a brother man; no worse, no better, than the humble disciple from whose lips gushed the supplications of a heart overflowing with love to all men. Sir, that man who so feels would suffer the fires of the stake rather than extend your institution by any act of his; and yet I doubt not that man would look to the eradication of slavery among yourselves only through the silent but effective operations of that Gospel which brings peace on earth and good will to men.

Now, sir, so believing, the northern man says: "Slavery is an institution which, from the beginning of this Government up to the present moment, and long before this Government was formed, was recognized by the law of England to be local in its character, deriving its whole force from the local and municipal law; an institution whose validity, whose sanction, exists alone by virtue of the law of the State or Territory in which the slave lives." Again, our northern men, as they look over the history of the country, see that, among the boldest Abolitionists of the early day—before the popular mind had become so heated that it could not listen to the voice of humanity in behalf of the negro—were such men as Jefferson, Washington, Franklin, and Henry; and when they read the debates of our national convention, they see, or think they see, that the principles of the Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal," and have certain "inalienable rights," which are enumerated—I say they see these principles embodied in the Constitution of the country. They see, indeed, that the southern negro has not the right to vote; yet he is represented upon the floor of this House. They know that, for every five negroes who live in the South, three of them are represented, the same as three free men, in this Hall. They know that there is a provision in the Constitution that, when a slave escapes from his master into a free State, he cannot be recognized as free by the laws of that State, but must be returned to the person to whom his labor belonged; and this provision they believe to be a recognition in the Constitution that slavery is local; and, but for this fugitive-from-labor provision,

could have no existence beyond the law of the State. They know, too, that there was a provision in that Constitution that, in twenty years after it went into effect, a traffic which, I believe, the South, as well as the North, still recognize as piratical and infernal, was to be abolished; and that, even before that period had elapsed, it was abolished. This, too, the North considers another evidence of the local character of slavery, inasmuch as, without this restriction, Congress, under its power over commerce, could have at once stopped the increase of slaves by means of the slave trade.

Allow me to say, Mr. Speaker, that, though I refer to the Chicago platform, I care no more about it than I do about the Breckinridge platform, except so far as I believe it to express principles which I think it my duty to support. If the Chicago platform sustains the principles which I uphold, I maintain and defend it; if it does not, I spit upon it and trample it under my feet. The Chicago platform says that the maintenance of the principles of the Declaration of Independence are essential to the perpetuity of Republican institutions. The Chicago platform says that the normal condition of a Territory is one of freedom, and not slavery. It recognizes, in effect, that before the Constitution of the United States was adopted, our fathers abolished slavery in all the Territories of the United States; that when this glorious Republic first went into operation, no slave soil outside of the slave States existed in the Union; that the policy of our fathers was, that slavery should ultimately be abolished by the slave States, because they believed it a moral, social, and political evil, entailed upon them by the cupidity of British merchants. Washington, as we well know, said there was no man who desired more than he to see slavery abolished by law; and Benjamin Franklin declared, in a petition which he presented to this body, I believe, that the Congress of the United States ought to step to the very verge of the Constitution in order to abolish it.

Again: the Chicago platform says that the normal condition of a Territory is that of freedom: and what further does it say? That it is the duty of Congress, whenever occasion requires it, to prohibit the introduction of slavery into the Territories of the Union, and denies the authority of Congress, of a Territorial Legislature, or of any individual, to give legal existence to slavery in any Territory of the United States.

Now, I am confident the South will not say to the North, "give up your principle." I have heard no man make such a requirement; yet the South says to us: "You surrender no principle by giving up to slavery all the territory south of 36° 30', and protecting slavery there by congressional or constitutional enactments."

Now, I propose to show that the majority of the committee of thirty-three asks the Republicans of the North to give up a principle, and to give up the Chicago platform, as I understand it. Allow me to say just here, that I have, in common with probably every gentleman upon this floor, received repeated communications from my constituents; but in no instance, in no single instance,

have they for one moment wavered in their support and maintenance of the Chicago platform. In every instance have they declared it to be their conviction that the Republicans in Congress should, at all hazards, adhere to their principles in reference to slavery in the Territories, as announced in the Chicago platform.

I have believed, from the beginning of this discussion until now, that, as fair and honest men, dealing justly by our brethren in the South, it was the bounden duty of the Republicans to say to them: "Gentlemen, the opinion of our constituents in reference to slavery in the Territories is, that it ought not to be established there, and we understand the Chicago platform to mean that it is the duty of Congress to prevent by legislation, when it is necessary, the introduction of slavery in the Territories; we mean to represent our constituents on this floor; we mean that you shall know what we intend to do, if we have the power. Not, sir, that I am not anxious for compromise; but it is impossible for us to compromise upon the basis demanded by us, without a disgraceful surrender of principle. I voted against the raising of this select committee of thirty-three. I believed that it could never reconcile opinions which are so diametrically opposed to each other; and I believe so still.

Mr. Speaker, the majority of that committee propose, in effect, to admit the Territories of New Mexico and Arizona as slave States. Let the country understand that, North and South, and meet it fully and squarely.

By the law of 1850, the compromise measures, which I never subscribed to, but always opposed, it was provided that the institution of slavery might go into the Territory of New Mexico; and the preamble of this report states that whereas, by that law, the institution of slavery has already been legalized in the Territories of New Mexico and Arizona; therefore resolved, that the said Territories be formed into a State, and admitted with such constitution as the people there shall establish for themselves, provided it is republican in form, according to the principles upon which the other States have been admitted. I say, then, stripped of all pretense and laid bare to the gaze, the proposition of the majority of the committee is no more and no less than that the Territories of New Mexico and Arizona shall be admitted with slavery implanted in their constitutions by law. As an honest man, believing, as I do, that the institution of slavery is repugnant to the principles upon which our Constitution and our Government rest, I never will vote for a measure which I believe saps the foundation stone upon which the whole structure is erected. All other questions are of little consequence; whether slavery is abolished in the District of Columbia for the next ten, or twenty, or a hundred years, is a matter comparatively of little importance.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is a different thing when we propose to nationalize slavery by making all territory south of $36^{\circ}30'$ a State, with or without slavery, as its constitution may provide, ignoring the fact that slavery is now spread over New Mexico by virtue of the territorial law, not only African slavery in its most objectionable form,

but peon slavery, which embraces whites as well as blacks, citizens as well as those who, under the decision of the Supreme Court, are entitled to no rights which a white man is bound to respect. When we thus admit New Mexico, without first purging it of slavery and peonage, both of which we have the unquestioned right to prevent the Territorial Legislature from establishing—when we thus sanction the act of a Territorial Legislature making free territory slave, we nationalize slavery, we recognize it as property; we fail to exercise the twofold power which Congress has, first, to repeal the territorial law; second, to refuse to admit a slave State, by which the further extension of slavery may be prevented. We make every man in this Union guilty of extending slavery. And, sir, it is no answer to say, that from 1850 until now, with the full power to carry slavery there, but twenty-four slaves have been carried there. It is no answer to say that the parched plains of New Mexico are unfitted to slave labor; no answer to say that God has established the law of freedom over those Territories more effectual than human codes. Sir, I cannot forget that Indiana, when a Territory, repeatedly applied to Congress for permission to hold slaves, nor the noble response of Virginia's eccentric but talented and patriotic statesman. Sir, I cannot forget that in that mighty empire which throws its arms around the Arctic ocean, slavery has existed in its worst forms from time immemorial, and that our own ancestors, the villeins of merry England, were chattel slaves; nor can I forget that, unknown in name, but existing in fact, slavery has ever gone and flourished, too, unless the free hearts of the people have erected a barrier of law to prevent its ingress. Nor can I forget that even our own African slavery has been pronounced by the best, the ablest, and the most eloquent of southern statesmen, glaringly inconsistent with the principles of liberty and equality which gave birth to our Revolution, and out of which our Constitution and laws have grown.

Plant slavery in New Mexico and Arizona. Let it be forever in contact with the fertile cotton-fields of Texas, and with those other fields which the chairman of the committee of thirty-three has so logically shown to be capable of sustaining sixty million slaves—nearly twice the present population of the United States—and who can tell what will be the future destiny of that vast Territory, large enough to make twenty-four States the size of Massachusetts. As the rocks and mountains of New England, its granite, and its ice, have been made to sustain a dense population, who knows what people may yet swarm over even the sterile plains of New Mexico? Who knows what new arts, what new appliances, what unimagined discoveries may convert the desert into a garden? Sir, I have seen the sand-hills of a southern farm, where even the stunted pine would scarcely thrive, converted into luxuriant clover-fields by the enterprise and industry of Yankee farmers; and sleek and well-fed herds grazing where the prickly pear was before the chief vegetable. May not the same industry and skill that have reclaimed the plains of Holland from the waters, and which gather now the vintage from the mountains of

Switzerland, yet give fertility to the plains and mountains of New Mexico and Arizona? And shall we sanction slavery there now by congressional action, or by constitutional guarantees?

When I heard the gentleman from Virginia, [Mr. MILLSON,] who—rising above his surroundings and the position of his party, made to my mind a glorious Union speech—state that the two parties of the North and the South had fought, and had both won and both been conquered; that the North had substantially excluded slavery from the Territories, and the South had established the principle announced by the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court of the United States, I differed with him. I would, sir, rather have the acorn, folded up as it is in its little shell, than the mighty oak that gave it birth, as it stands blasted by the lightning stroke; for the acorn will make oaks upon oaks and clothe the world in forests. So, sir, I would rather establish one principle, one abstraction, one truth, than to have the aggregated facts of the universe in my favor; because the truth, the principle, the abstraction, will overthrow everything that stands in its way. When the great Teacher of the Christian religion taught God is love, and told his Disciples to love one another, it was a mere abstraction; but, sir, it has revolutionized the world; given birth to arts and sciences; founded and perpetuated free institutions.

Establish the abstraction that we should love one another, and bring it into daily practice, and it will root out every evil, either in the individual man or in the body-politic. I would rather have every foot of the Territories of the United States, north as well as south, covered with slavery, than to have established the principle that man can hold property in man under the provisions of the Constitution of the United States. Abstractions, Mr. Speaker, are more deadly than cannon balls. They will reach where bomb-shells cannot touch. Give me the abstraction, and you may take the reality. That is the reason the Republican party declares, in substance, that it will not abide by the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States. It is the principle, the abstraction, which it wars against—not against the court, nor the case it decided—but it is the principle which is to measure and decide all other cases that we repudiate and condemn. As a lawyer by profession, and having had the honor to hold a humble place upon the bench, there is no man who reveres more than I do the judicial character, or who will go further to give all the force it is entitled to to the judicial decision. But I may say here, as I understand the principles of our Government, that it will never do to declare a judicial decision can infringe a principle of liberty. Pile decision upon decision, in the language of the courts of the United States themselves, in a matter “concerning the liberties of the citizens, precedent is not to be regarded.”

The principle of the Dred Scott decision, which is claimed on the part of the South, is that man may hold property in man under the Constitution of the United States in the Territories of the United States. It is either right or wrong. If it be right, I hold it should stand eternal as the hills; and if wrong, vanish like the mists of morning

before the sunbeams of truth. Tell me that the decision of a Jeffreys, a tyrant upon the bench, shall abide through all coming time! It is against all reason, as well as against all liberty. I do not understand, however, that the Dred Scott decision is, in point of fact, what it is claimed to be on the part of the South; but I do understand that it substantially establishes that principle so far as the opinions of a majority of the members of that court can establish it. I say for one, that the Republican party—make use of it, secessionists, if you can; for it is true, you are entitled to it—I say, sir, that the Republican party is planted in opposition to that decision; and so sure as the sun rises and sets, that principle never can be established in this country. Come Union or disunion, come peace or war, never, never, never will a true Republican abandon that which he believes underlies our free institutions.

Anybody who will read the resolutions adopted at Chicago will see that the Republican party is planted upon another principle, which, if understood and disseminated at the South, would, I think, crush secession, and uplift once more upon Fort Moultrie the stars and stripes—and that is, non-interference with the institution of slavery in the States where it now exists. The South is thus assured of all that the Constitution grants them.

Mr. Speaker, I am not disposed to discuss whether South Carolina, or any of the cotton States or border States, have a right to leave the Union. I believe that government is derived from the consent of the governed. I believe that the right of revolution is as essential to a republican Government as any other set out in the Declaration of Independence. Were I an officer in the United States Navy or Army, and my State seceded, I would not hesitate for a moment to throw up my commission, and return to the ranks of my people.

That is the position that I should occupy. I am loyal to my State. I am standing with my fellow-countrymen, with whom I was reared and educated, with whom all my feelings, with whom all my principles, are associated. Neither will I discuss that other question: which is the strongest, the North or the South? I look upon it as mere braggadocio; and of all the occupations which men pursue, I think that of the braggart is the meanest and the smallest. As was well said by the gentleman from Virginia [Mr. HARRIS] to-day, “the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.” I depend, sir, for the strength of the North, upon the principles which it advocates; and if they be right, I do not fear, if occasion requires it, to submit our cause to the God of battles. But, sir, I conceive such a contingency to be entirely out of the question. Who is going to fire the first gun? Who is going to put the pistol to his brother’s breast? Who is going to make the first home desolate? Who is going first to spread sorrow and agony in the breasts of women and children? Who is going to place in hostile array, not merely in position but in act, the two parts of this great Confederacy? Who dreams that in a struggle such as that which would take place between the North and

the South, a single battle-field will decide the issue? The wars of the houses of York and Lancaster will pale into insignificance—the battles that desolated the fairest fields of Europe for centuries will become insignificant in comparison. We, when we had but three million people, threw down the gage of battle to the powerful empire of Great Britain. We had then only few ships and few soldiers, without arms, and almost bankrupt; yet we came through the war of the Revolution victorious—not a star erased, not a stripe defaced. And will it be said that the eight million of the South cannot defend their firesides, their altars and their homes, against the eighteen million of the North? I have not a moment's doubt about it—not a moment's.

It seems to me that the poorest argument that could possibly be presented, is this idea that we can conquer the South by force of arms on the field of battle. As a citizen of the great State of New York, I will, in defense of her rights, vote men and money, and send my children into the battle-field, and even—which God grant may never happen—imbue my hands in the blood of a brother. While I see that dread alternative before me, I never can give up the conviction of my mind that it would be brutal and inhuman butchery. No, sir; loving free institutions as I do; believing, as I do, that all men are created equal; that before the eyes of the just God the poor man is as high as the rich, and the negro as the white, alone, alone though it be, I hesitate not to make the assertion, that I believe that, when the immortal spirit of man is stripped of its tenement of clay, and stands before the throne of the Almighty, the master and slave will be measured, not by the color of their skin or the crisp of their hair, but by the affections of the heart and the intelligence of the soul, and the virtue of the life; believing, as I do, that all men are equal, I would rather make a peaceful division than shed a drop of blood. I would rather see this Capitol crumble into dust than see a single human soul lost. Feeling and thinking so, I have no fear for principles. If I were disposed to enter the field of imagination and picture to myself the future of the North, grounded as it is on free institutions, with free colleges in every State, with free schools in every mile square, with the homes of educated men covering every hill-top and every valley, with a hardy yeomanry who are not ashamed or afraid of work, believing that God gave the hand to toil, the head to think, the heart to feel, I should have no fear for the future of the North. I would hope that the future of the South might be as glorious, as prosperous, and as happy as the future of the North; and, sir, had I the power—which I have not—I would pursue no policy towards our brethren of the South other than what necessity required. If they plant their cannon at the mouth of the Mississippi, and attempt to make tributary to them the great States that lie in the valley of the Mississippi, I would say to them first, in tones of respectful expostulation, "Give us the free navigation of our rivers;" and if they refused that, I would not hew my way to the seaboard, but I would plant my ships at the mouth of the river, and I would carry coercion—if you choose to call

it so—no further than was absolutely necessary to protect the vital interests of the North. I would almost say to South Carolina, "Rather than shed blood, I will even surrender the fort over which alone the flag of the Union now floats." I feel, sir, that no ignominy has been cast upon our Republic by all that South Carolina has done. Were she a foreign State, I should feel different; but though erring, she is still a sister State; and I remember, sir, her Sumter. I remember her Marion and his men. I remember him who, of all her statesmen, I most esteemed when he was in his glory, (John C. Calhoun,) mistaken as I believe him to have been. I remember him, and I would treat South Carolina as, in the Bible, the father treated the prodigal son. Let her go. I would use no more force against her than is absolutely necessary for self-preservation and the protection of the great interests of the country. I would let time work its effects upon her. I would wait until she got hungry, and then I would give her bread. I would wait until she got naked, and then I would clothe her. And if she ever did come back, I would run to meet her half way, and throw my arms around her, and call upon my servants to kill the fatted kid and make music and festival because the lost one had returned. And, if it becomes necessary to sink ships in her harbor and shut up her port, when she comes back into this great family of States, I will be the first to vote appropriations for their removal. While she and the cotton States remain out, I would have our flag wave, as I saw it waving above these gas-lights to-night, with no star erased, in the hope that at last even South Carolina will again return. I would not give that hope up, and we need never give it up, until blood is shed.

Then, when the day of passion begins its rule, God only knows where it will stop. Sir, I shudder at the thought. I have looked upon my fate as most blessed, not for the individual benefits which I enjoy, but for the heritage of freedom and civilization, which I expected to hand down to my children. God only knows what the condition of our country will be if our hands are imbrued in one another's blood. I say to the South: Peace! wait; shed not blood. Let not these cannon that run along our streets send forth their showers of grape and canister, as at Buena Vista and Cerro Gordo and Chapultepec. Let not the iron hail rattle among the bones of our fellow-men. Let every man feel that in his hands, on his heart, on his mind, depend, perhaps, not only the lives of millions of men, but the liberties and the happiness of countless millions. If this nation should be plunged into civil war, when may we hope again to rear such another temple as this to the goddess of Liberty? I hope yet, sir, to see the time when the highest stone will be put upon the dome of this proud Capitol. I hope yet to see the day when the bronze image of that goddess of Liberty, for whom we fought in the days of the Revolution, will stand triumphant upon its summit.

Mr. Speaker, I had intended to cite the opinions of statesmen of North Carolina during the debate on the adoption of the national Constitution in the convention of that State, in which, at

that early day, the principle of coercion was advocated and sustained. I had intended, also, to show, as briefly as I could, that the present agitation of the South for the introduction of slavery into all the Territories, under the Constitution of the United States, was commenced in 1847, by the

introduction of a resolution by John C. Calhoun; and that, prior to that time, such a right had never been demanded; but I see that the time allotted to me has nearly expired, and it would be impossible for me to present my views upon that subject as fully as I would desire.

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